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## **The Raj in radio wars: BBC monitoring reports on broadcasts for Indian audiences during the Second World War**

Diya Gupta

### **Introduction**

A photograph in George Orwell's published selection of English-language broadcasts to India, called *Talking to India* (1943), represents Indian soldiers gathered around a BBC microphone. Its caption states: 'Hello Punjab – A soldier of the Indian contingent broadcasting to his family in India from a BBC studio.' Images of broadcasting Indian soldiers were repeatedly used by British publications to bolster Allied propaganda during the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in a little-known Bengali novel entitled *Rangrut* (*The Recruit*, 1950), listening to the radio carries an entirely different political meaning. The novel explores the journey of a group of Bengali youths from recruiting offices in Calcutta to the Burma front. We are told that, as soon as the words '*Banglae khobor bolchhi*' ('Here's the news in Bengali') are announced on the radio, everyone gathers to listen. The men, on hearing that the Red Army is only thirty miles from Berlin, spell out the connection between world events and their lives: they too are forging ahead, like the Red Army, against their oppressors – not the Japanese forces they are meant to be fighting against but rather 'the enemy within', colonial authorities in their own military unit.<sup>2</sup>

*Talking to India* and *Rangrut* represent two compelling drives in radio broadcasting for Indian audiences during the Second World War, where wartime listenership was shaped by the complex crosscurrents of Indian political discourse. While images of Indian soldiers recording messages for home transform into useful material for Allied propaganda, the literary portrayal of Bengali servicemen finding inspiration from communist Russia to overthrow colonialism rather than fascism becomes subversive to the British Empire – precisely the target of Axis transmissions. With both Allied and Axis broadcasts vying for dominance over Indian 'loyalty', BBC Monitoring reports capture snapshots of these 'grand narratives' of political developments in their everyday workings, in granular detail.

The purpose of this article is to examine the political positions in 1940s India through the prism of these detailed monitoring reports. It argues that examining the monitoring transcripts – a historically neglected resource<sup>3</sup> – enables us to come to a richer understanding of the complex specifics of wartime India's political landscape. Rather than unmediated accounts of India-oriented broadcasts, this article views the reports as processes of representation, crafted by the agency of the monitors who exercised choice in what and how to transcribe. In this context, the article also seeks to assess critically the Monitoring Service's collection priorities and surveillance techniques. If monitoring becomes an intellectual task rather than a mechanical one, how does each stage of the process – selecting, listening to and translating broadcast transmissions – relate to the knowledge, skills and assessment abilities of the monitor? And how do these reports, then, create ideological and cultural meaning for wartime India?

This study of wartime monitoring transcripts sits at the intersection between recent scholarly interest in India and the Second World War; a smaller body of work on the history

of radio, wartime propaganda and India; and new explorations into global radio and transnational modernism in literary studies. It seeks to lend momentum to a growing field of research on pre-independent India and its profound transformation in the Second World War, to which scholars such as Rajit Mazumder in *The Indian Army and the Making of the Punjab* (2003), Kaushik Roy in *War and Society in Colonial India, 1807 – 1945* (2006), Gajendra Singh in *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy* (2014) and Yasmin Khan in *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (2015) have contributed. It is also indebted to early works exploring the role of broadcasts in wartime India such as Partha Sarathy Gupta's *The Radio and the Raj* (1988), along with articles by Joselyn Zivin, Alasdair Pinkerton and Jane Robbins on broadcasting in British India. The role of Indian intellectuals like Mulk Raj Anand in creating BBC wartime broadcasts for Indian audiences has been explored by literary scholars Ruvani Ranasinha, Susheila Nasta and Daniel Morse, among others.<sup>4</sup> This article seeks to broaden the field of such enquiry by reflecting on monitoring transcripts for both Allied and Axis broadcasts, and open up avenues of enquiry as to how monitoring reports fed into the India section of the BBC Eastern Service's programming.

This paper begins with an evaluation of the monitoring reports as archival material, briefly analysing their challenges and arguing for their value as historical resource. It then outlines the nature of political discourse in 1940s India, drawing attention to shifting loyalties in support of or opposition to participation in the Second World War. It links these political positions to the types of radio transmissions Indian audiences were listening to, explores the mechanisms by which BBC monitoring operated within India and Britain, and discusses the inferences we can make in relation to monitoring processes. The next section analyses how the monitors understood and recorded colonial propaganda broadcasts made within India, while the final section focuses on monitors' accounts of Indian radical and advocate of armed resistance against the British, Subhas Chandra Bose, and how he was framed and represented by Axis propaganda.

### **BBC Monitoring transcripts: opportunities and challenges as archival material**

BBC Monitoring Services, established from the start of the Second World War at Wood Norton in Worcestershire and Caversham Park in Reading from 1943 onwards, generated its reports in principally two ways.<sup>5</sup> After intercepting broadcasts, monitors would create original transcripts, which were worked on by editors to polish the use of the English language. Out of these transcripts, edited documents called 'Digests' were produced and distributed to BBC Monitoring customers, which could range from the BBC's own news bulletins to a raft of British wartime institutions including the Ministry of Information, War Cabinet and Special Operations Executive (SOE).<sup>6</sup> Laura Johnson notes that the transmissions listened to by the BBC monitors were extensive, both for languages monitored and the number of broadcasting countries covered. When war began in September 1939, monitors were recruited to cover six core language broadcasts: English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic and Polish. Transmissions in these languages from Germany were included too, along with broadcasts from Italy, France, Belgium, Spain, the USSR and the USA. In the next year, the Monitoring Service expanded rapidly: aided by talented multilingual monitors, the Service was reporting on broadcasts in over 20 languages and from 30 countries by the end of 1940, including Hindustani and Persian from

Germany. Johnson observes that the methodology underpinning the creation of the transcripts was to draw upon 'broadcast knowledge of events, developments, and their international presentation and interpretation' and channel them into 'official flows of information [...] to wage Britain's information, political and military war.'<sup>7</sup> They were used, then, to guide and conduct British propaganda, indicate Axis intentions and provide a direct source of military intelligence.<sup>8</sup> The transcripts thus served as primary material out of which to forge British responses to both Indian war participation and anti-colonial, revolutionary dissent.

This article concentrates on the monitoring transcripts rather than the 'Digests', as the former bring us closer to the fullness of original broadcasts while raising questions behind the purpose of their documentation. Analysing this material, even within the perimeters of India-related content for the Second World War, is a considerable task due to the volume of transcripts available. Yet it is an important one as the transcripts offer us new textures of historical meaning by performing a critical function unavailable in the 'Digests'. They convey to us, in their materiality – in typed copy being annotated and amended by an editorial pen, in numerous verbal insertions and deletions – the sense of 'raw histories'<sup>9</sup> being unearthed, of scribbled jottings shaping the representation of lived experience as it takes place.

Manuscript-like, the transcripts enable us to penetrate a particular historical moment; as their rich seams are mined, they highlight the Indian subcontinent's critical role in the war for both the British Empire and the Axis powers. After the Japanese occupation of Singapore in February 1942, while he was working for the BBC to disseminate propaganda broadcasts to India, Orwell noted: 'India bec[a]me for the time being the centre of the war, one might say the centre of the world.'<sup>10</sup> The transcripts too reveal how much of a geopolitical hotspot India was perceived to be after Japanese victories over British colonies in Southeast Asia between December 1941 and February 1942. The collection thus develops and enriches the growing historical narrative of the Second World War outside its dominant Eurocentric frame, as well as offers insights into the conflicting political positions of 1940s India.

### **Wartime politics, Indian radio listenership and BBC monitoring activities**

'The usual question when an Indian brought a wireless set, according to the big dealers in Bombay, was "Can I hear Germany and Japan on this?"'<sup>11</sup>

In 1940s India, intersections between political positions and 'causes' generated a shifting landscape of motivation, making it difficult to affix a singular identity on the Indian people: were they nationalist, anti-colonialist, anti-fascist, communist, or pro-imperialist? While nationalism contested colonialism and therefore challenged India's participation in an imperial war – including over two million men voluntarily signing up for service in the British Indian Army<sup>12</sup> – other political discourses also dominated. Communism intersected with anti-fascism as revolutionary communist factions, to whom the war became 'The People's War' after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, supported their former imperialist adversaries in a transnational ideological battle against fascism.<sup>13</sup> These home-front political developments found their counterpart over the airwaves, as Indians became targets for 'a pincer movement'<sup>14</sup> of Axis propaganda – from Germany in the west and Japan in the east, which fused itself with the militaristic independence movement spearheaded by Subhas

Chandra Bose. Monitoring reports on Axis propaganda provide insightful evidence of this pincer attack.

While monitoring for Indian audiences seems to have mainly taken place at Wood Norton and Caversham Park, from August 1942 – coinciding with the launch of Mohandas Gandhi's Quit India Movement – the Monitoring Service also received copies of transmissions monitored in New Delhi.<sup>15</sup> Two separate monitoring enterprises had been established in India: the Far Eastern Bureau Monitoring Service in Delhi, under the Ministry of Information, which monitored broadcasts in Hindustani, Punjabi, Tamil, Persian, Arabic, and Bengali;<sup>16</sup> and another monitoring unit directed by the Government of India's Department of Information and Broadcasting.<sup>17</sup> India was thus being covered extensively both in Britain and the subcontinent itself, to the extent that Assistant Controller of Overseas Services stated in a letter to the New Delhi Director that, given the Far Eastern Bureau material, there seemed to be an excess of monitoring reports from India.<sup>18</sup>

But who were the monitors themselves and what were their connections, if any, to India? It has been difficult to source information on monitors working in India during the Second World War, and also problematic to ascertain whether any monitors working in Britain were of Indian descent, although a list of monitors' names from 1939 would indicate that this was not so.<sup>19</sup> Many monitors were academics, as noted by art historian Ernst Gombrich who worked at the wartime BBC Monitoring Service, and their perspectives on the significance of broadcasts varied considerably with the editors preparing the 'Digests'.<sup>20</sup> Monitors had the responsibility for translating transmissions, with discretionary powers regarding how fully to report each item, and in transmissions monitored for important items only, were also given the freedom to choose which items to report on.<sup>21</sup> Johnson notes that monitors seem to have been motivated not only by academic interest, but also by a conviction that a more insightful understanding of the regime they were fighting against could help defeat the former, both militarily through assessing intent, and politically by providing material for Allied propaganda.<sup>22</sup>

How, in fact, did Allied broadcast propaganda make its way to Indian ears? Simon Potter notes how imperial links with broadcasting services in the white Dominions – Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa – were initially more robust than with the colonies, and the 'idea of a white British world'<sup>23</sup> shaped the representation of empire by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to its domestic audience. This began to change just before the start of hostilities that marked the Second World War. Potter observes how, from 1933 onwards, the BBC began to play a more central role in setting up public broadcasting authorities within the British Empire.<sup>24</sup> While broadcasting personnel from the colonies and the dominions started to travel more and build interpersonal connections, the BBC also invested more into broadcasts targeted at the Empire with particular audience groups in mind.<sup>25</sup> By 1939, it aimed to facilitate exchanges between the Empire and Britain, with material from the dominions being brought back to the colonial metropole, and disseminated to other parts of the Empire via short-wave radio.<sup>26</sup> Again, while public broadcasting authorities in Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand were seen to work in partnership with the BBC, in the colonies the imperial state envisaged its role as either that of examining private monopolies over radio or following the Indian model of direct state control through the setting up of All India Radio.<sup>27</sup>

Official British transmissions in undivided India began somewhat hesitantly during the late 1920s and 1930s, with All India Radio finally being established with Lionel Fielden from the BBC placed in charge in 1935, and Bokhari in 1940.<sup>28</sup> The venture was not thought of as particularly successful: the number of wireless licences bought across India, for instance, in 1932 was 8,557, growing to 92,782 at the end of 1939, among a population of 380 million.<sup>29</sup> However, the onset of war and India being declared a belligerent by the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, without consulting the burgeoning Indian political leadership in the Indian National Congress,<sup>30</sup> changed the significance of listening to the radio and highlighted how broadcasting was used as a tool of transnational propaganda during the Second World War. The first listener research conducted by All India Radio in 1940 across five Indian cities and surveying 13,507 listeners revealed that 'more Indians were using the radio for news, and for news hostile to Britain'; German broadcasts in English and Hindustani were 'widely listened to although belief in their truthfulness varies.'<sup>31</sup> German broadcasts were later viewed by Fielden as being 'swallowed by the masses like a patent medicine advertisement' and from June 1940, Indian holders of radio licences were prohibited from publicly disseminating Axis broadcasts.<sup>32</sup>

German radio stations, nonetheless, continued to be much more popular than the British ones. The Maharaja of Jodhpur noted in December 1940 how 'at 8 pm every day practically every owner of a wireless receiving set in the city tuned into the broadcast from Berlin.'<sup>33</sup> Axis propaganda, infused as it was with powerful anti-colonial messages, seemed to be taken seriously by Indian audiences. Again, as Joselyn Zivin points out, the radio also became a weapon of 'the domestic war being fought with the Indian national movement.'<sup>34</sup> Congress radicals started secret transmissions in August 1942 with the launch of the Quit India movement, continuing until discovered by police in November 1942. Broadcasts were in English and Hindustani, describing police and military violence along with details of revolutionary activities across the country. They also urged Indians to stop supporting the British war effort.<sup>35</sup> These varied attractions of the radio were further compounded by the charismatic Subhas Chandra Bose, broadcasting from Germany in February 1942, where he capitalised on the wave of Japanese victories over British territories and the Quit India movement, which was launched later that year. Bose continued overseas transmissions to India from Germany and then Southeast Asia up until June 1945, even after the Indian National Army under his command, fighting alongside the Japanese, had been defeated by the British-led Fourteenth Army.<sup>36</sup>

What did Indian people tuning in to these broadcasts make of them? It is impossible to know for sure, of course, nor do we know how many people were listening. Is there, therefore, the possibility of distortion in the audio representation of India's political landscape if the broadcasts were not reaching the people they were aimed at? The rise in the numbers of radio licences purchased, however, would suggest that certain transmissions were becoming popular. By March 1947, two years after the end of the war, the number of radio receiver licences in India rose to 243,838, compared with 205,130 in 1946.<sup>37</sup> This was a substantial increase from 1932; however, listenership figures would be far greater than the numbers of issued licences, affordable only to a minority. Yasmin Khan observes how the act of collective listening was prevalent at the time, also emphasised by the Bengali novel *Rangrut* which mentions soldiers on the battlefield hearing about the Red

Army on the radio in groups, a reference with which this article begins. Radio sets, Khan explains, would be accompanied by loudspeakers being placed in public parks and outside shop fronts, particularly if an important piece of news was expected.<sup>38</sup> Listening to the radio, then, also became important because it was an act performed together in the same physical space, experienced at the same moment: events of nation-forming significance, such as India and Pakistan's independence from the Raj and Partition, were later announced in postwar years through the airwaves.<sup>39</sup>

BBC monitors were certainly aware of the changing international situation as the war progressed, and although how much they knew about growing radio listenership or how audiences accessed broadcasts in India is uncertain, they did undertake a 24-hour coverage of Germany and German-occupied territories from 1939 onwards up until the end of the war, including broadcasts from Zeesen, known for its short-wave wartime transmissions, to India. Richard Marriott, the head of interception at Monitoring, outlined in a memo in 1939 that almost half the monitors were employed on recording German-origin broadcasts, and more than half the total numbers of requests received by the Monitoring department asked for information on these. Other countries' broadcasting was therefore monitored more selectively. While broadcasts from India started being monitored from June 1941, monitoring of India-oriented transmissions from Germany began earlier, in 1940.<sup>40</sup> This is also the year when the Monitoring Service underwent rapid expansion, recruited more multilingual monitors and covered a wider range of languages, including Hindustani and 'Persian'.<sup>41</sup> As a contrast, monitors seem to have focused on English-language broadcasts from the 'Indian Home Service' in Delhi.<sup>42</sup> The next section will examine how monitors navigated and represented the nature of this colonial propaganda being broadcast in India.

### **Colonial propaganda and British broadcasts in India**

Transcripts of Allied propaganda for India, while mapping the daily pulse of wartime developments, also shore up the declining British Raj's imperial fantasies. Broadcasts monitored include those demonstrating Indian 'loyalty' through the reaction of princes like the Maharaja of Bikaner who pledged funds in support of the British war effort, just like in the First World War. Transcripts also note the fundraising efforts of Gurkha regiments to buy transport facilities such as motor ambulances for themselves.<sup>43</sup> While these contributions are lauded in the broadcasts, suggesting that the Indian people must believe this war to be their own, monitoring strategies are also at play here. BBC Monitoring Service's coverage was principally directed by customers of the service, i.e., those who received the broadcast reports produced by the monitors. As mentioned previously, these included the BBC itself, British government departments like the War Office and the India Office, and even governments of other countries along with America's own monitoring service, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS).<sup>44</sup> It was clearly important for the monitors to document Indian 'loyalty' to the war effort from traditional sources – the princes and the Gurkhas had long been supporters of the British and continued to be so. Such information could shape Allied propaganda and quash nationalist opposition.

Again, Indian support for the war effort is underscored by transcripts focusing on ceremonial displays of Indian troops. The Duke of Gloucester's inspection of Indian troops in

June 1942 shows monitors' interest in documenting how the trappings of statehood and Empire were visually exhibited. The extract begins:

On his departure from India the Duke of Gloucester has sent a message to the C-in-C [Commander-in-Chief], General Wavell, declaring he was much impressed by the bearing, turn-out and spirit of the units he had inspected. He expressed his confidence that when these forces enter into battle, wherever it may be, they will prove themselves worthy of the great fighting traditions of the races to which they belong.<sup>45</sup>

This is an allusion to the colonial 'martial races' theory (a spurious one), according to which Indian people of certain ethnicities and religions were considered to be inherently more militaristic than others.<sup>46</sup> However, the British Indian Army could not maintain the levels of recruitment necessary for the war if it only adhered to the so-called 'martial races.' Unlike in Britain, conscription was never introduced in India, and enlisting was therefore voluntary. But the British Empire needed men urgently, and requirements for entry were relaxed, including the acceptance of underweight and anaemic applicants. Joining the army, then, meant access to food, medicine and better health. As Indivar Kamtekar explains, 'In a strictly legal sense, the men were indeed volunteers who enlisted of their own will; but most of them, desperate for jobs, were forced to join up through necessity.'<sup>47</sup>

The transcript quoting the Duke of Gloucester refers to a pre-war colonial imagining of the Indian Army as the perfectly crafted imperial tool, glossing over the realities of Second World War recruitment practices, its cracks and fissures. Monitoring activities thus shed light on the ideological nature of the language used in British broadcasts. But why did monitors select the Duke of Gloucester's visit to be transcribed in such detail? There seems to have been an impetus to map the ways by which Allied propaganda could operate in India, locating key moments and figures in radio broadcasts on which/whom these messages were pinned. Recording the broadcast in full also indicates monitors' interest in the language used by the Duke of Gloucester. Johnson observes in her thesis that the language used by a state-controlled source 'relates to the narrative it hopes will dominate popular perception.'<sup>48</sup> It is impossible to ascertain from the language employed here that, only two months later, the largest protests across the subcontinent against British rule since 1857 – the Quit India movement – would be ratified by Congress and launched by Gandhi. The transcript, then, highlights how the discourses of colonialism and nationalism continue to jostle against and contest one another throughout the war years.

Monitors also record a range of other, sometimes surprising, pieces of information. China's involvement in the war is mentioned, along with Chinese pilots being sent for training to America, and American influence in India in the building of airfields.<sup>49</sup> Such broadcasts were undoubtedly meant to demonstrate the combined power of Allied forces to Indian audiences. But what would have been other effects of such broadcasts, as speculations regarding India's postwar future amongst Indians themselves were rife? We do not know specific audience responses to broadcasts here, but analysing letters exchanged between international war fronts and the Indian home front at the time proves illuminating. A letter written by a 'European lady' stationed in Shimla, north India in August 1942 details how she was questioned by an Indian man about the presence of American troops in India. When she told him that the Americans were there to protect the subcontinent from Japanese invasion,



he refused to believe her, saying that instead it was because Britain meant to hand India over to America after the war.<sup>50</sup>

This urgent question of India's postwar future becomes mired in the turbulent domestic politics of the 1940s, as transcripts also dwell in detail on how the 1942 Quit India movement was being quelled. An extract from a transcript on riots in Dhanbad, Bihar is particularly revealing:

A communique issued this afternoon by the additional District Magistrate of Dhanbad gives details of disturbances in the town two days ago. The police found it necessary to fire on a big, violent crowd armed with *lathis* [sticks], brickbats and stones, intent upon committing arson. A sergeant-major, a constable and a *Chowkidar* [guard] were injured. Troops were posted in the affected area and the situation became normal after dusk.<sup>51</sup>

The phrase 'the police found it necessary to fire' reveals how colonial violence was being rationalised and justified: from an imperial perspective, Indian support for the war was imperative for victory, and all forms of protest needed to be subdued with force. But the protest movement itself did not remain peaceful, and the report also directs our attention to the agitators' barely contained violence – the crowd was 'intent upon committing arson'. Local initiatives and diverse goals saw the staunchly anti-government Quit India movement being defined by popular violence and unrest, guerrilla and sabotage activities up until 1944.<sup>52</sup> It was this mood of public defiance that Subhas Chandra Bose targeted in his broadcasts from Axis radio stations such as Zeesen in Germany.

### **Pirate radio, expatriate nationalism and the legacy of Subhas Chandra Bose**

Axis broadcast transcripts, diligently recorded by BBC monitors, largely focus on the supposed injustice of Allied war aims. These broadcasts began even before Subhas Chandra Bose made his dramatic escape from house arrest in Calcutta, reaching Germany in 1941 and Japan-occupied East Asia in 1943. Talks broadcast from Southeast Asia for Indian audiences warned against British and American intentions, stressed the commonality between India and Japan, and even reminded the audience of the shared Buddhist heritage of the two countries.<sup>53</sup> The broadcasts intensified alongside Japan's military victories in Southeast Asia between December 1941 and February 1942. The Indian Independence League, founded by Indian nationalist and revolutionary Rash Behari Bose (no relation to Subhas), started broadcasting from Japan in Hindustani on 12 August 1942 – perfectly timed with the launch of the Quit India movement on 9 August 1942.<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, in Germany, from 1933 onwards, the radio became an extraordinarily effective propaganda tool employed by the Nationalist Socialist powers, which intensified as the war progressed. By October 1939, German radio stations were transmitting in 18 languages; in 1944, this had increased to nearly 50 programmes in languages other than German. The short-wave transmitter in the village of Zeesen near Berlin was used for propaganda broadcasts to regions of the British Empire such as South Africa and India.<sup>55</sup> Subhas Chandra Bose's own speeches, transmitted from Zeesen via Azad Hind or Free India Radio, began from 1942, revealing the full potential of 'the pincer movement' of Axis propaganda closing in on India.<sup>56</sup>

Foregrounding British indifference to Indian suffering, particularly in response to the 1943 Bengal Famine in which over three million people died, the monitoring transcripts represent Germany and Japan as liberators from imperialism and supporters of subjugated peoples. During 1943, transcripts of Axis broadcasts repeatedly highlight food shortage and malaria epidemics in India, and note how food exports from Australia, originally meant for India, were diverted to South Africa. Some broadcasts directly take issue with the BBC's presentation of British Indian Army recruitment figures, saying that the numbers were incorrectly used as evidence of Indian support for the war. A typical transcript states:

Hunger and poverty are forcing the Indians to enlist in the Army. The Indian soldiers are being told that the British are fighting for the freedom of the world yet the Indians, who have made many sacrifices for the British, have not been given their liberty.<sup>57</sup>

To Indian anti-colonialists, nationalists and Quit India movement supporters (some Indian political communities, like the communists, did not back the protests), these broadcasts would have had considerable popular appeal.

Within this broader context of the exploitation of colonial rule, the transcripts also draw attention to Subhas Chandra Bose's activities abroad and portray how he himself is being represented in Axis broadcasts. A Hindustani broadcast transcript, translated into English, declares:

The British Empire will soon be destroyed. Subhas Chandra Bose has stated that no power on earth can save it from destruction. The present war is giving Indians the last and best opportunity for achieving their freedom.<sup>58</sup>

It highlights how the Second World War, viewed through the eyes of a colonised people, becomes a powerful tool of gaining independence. It is no surprise, then, that Subhas Chandra Bose's speeches and activities were closely monitored. Bose's audio messages appear to be based on the same premise as his impetus for creating the Indian National Army – serving 'as a catalyst for a civilian uprising against British rule.'<sup>59</sup> Yasmin Khan observes that for those listening in India to Bose's broadcasts and news of his political alliances abroad, there was 'an exhilarating thrill of a new world order' challenging two hundred years of colonial rule. Amidst the political upheavals in India, including the threat of invasion by the Japanese, Bose 'simplified the political task ahead and reduced it to one basic mission – the ejection of the British.'<sup>60</sup> The trajectory of his activities in Axis-occupied regions and the content of his broadcasts therefore needed careful surveillance by British intelligence so that they could be countered by Allied propaganda and internal Indian dissent suppressed. Furthermore, Bose was a high-profile political prisoner at large, and all news about him would have been valuable for his arrest.

Monitors also transcribe broadcasts that address perceived Axis 'sympathy' for India:

A great Indian leader met European leaders who are struggling with Japan for the establishment of a New Order in the world. India's destiny is closely connected with this New Order. This historic meeting proved that the Axis Powers fully sympathise with the Indians and their Struggle for independence.<sup>61</sup>

The means of achieving Indian independence was thus aligned with Axis victories; India's 'destiny' only becoming possible through a change in global structures of power that neatly equated to German and Japanese success. The celebratory tone of India's link with this

'New Order', however, masked political realities: Sugata Bose's description of Subhas Chandra Bose's 'historic meeting' with Hitler in May 1942 reveals that, although Hitler agreed to provide Bose with a submarine to take him to Southeast Asia, there was no German declaration in support of Indian independence.<sup>62</sup> It is also difficult, as mentioned before, to ascertain the effect of these broadcasts on an Indian audience. As we already know, German radio stations were more popular in India than British broadcasts. But did such broadcasts mitigate fears of a Japanese invasion and inspire belief in Bose's version of a militant anti-colonial nationalism formed outside the nation? Bose himself gained enormous popularity in India, and Khan notes that 'people huddled around clandestinely to listen to these addresses, although their ability to sway opinion – rather than simply to bolster those already committed to nationalism – remains unknown'.<sup>63</sup>

Bose's Indian National Army (INA) was defeated in July 1944 by the British-led Fourteenth Army at the Indo-Burma border, and INA soldiers retreated to Burma where they eventually surrendered to the British by 1945. Bose himself left the administration of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind (Free India) to members of his cabinet in Singapore and made his way across Southeast Asia. His next mission was securing support for India's independence from Russia – he had correctly predicted that the American-British alliance with Russia would not last beyond the war. However, he never completed the journey, dying of his injuries in a plane crash on 18 August 1945, soon after taking off from Taipei. Bose's death has been mired in controversy ever since and the subject of several official enquiries, although Sugata Bose convincingly puts conspiracy theories regarding him still being alive to rest. It is only posthumously, during the 1946 Red Fort Trials, that Bose's real influence over Indian audiences becomes visible. The trial accused three high-ranking INA officers – Bose's right-hand men – of treason against the British Raj, but their sentences had to be commuted because of the strength of Indian public support for them. The men were eventually released without charge.<sup>64</sup>

Monitoring reports maintain the spotlight on Bose since he continued to be a political and symbolic threat for the British Raj until his death. As a point of comparison, the Anglo-Irish broadcaster William Brooke Joyce, also known as Lord Haw-Haw, who made propaganda broadcasts from Berlin for Britain, was sentenced to death in 1946. Other Axis broadcasters were executed in the Netherlands and France: in at least one such court case, monitoring reports were used as evidence.<sup>65</sup> How the BBC Monitoring reports on Bose might have been employed if he had been captured alive by the British would have been complicated by Bose's reputation in India as a committed, even intransigent, nationalist. If he was tried in India, as the INA officers eventually were, colonial authorities predicted enormous public unrest.<sup>66</sup> Bose's untimely death certainly made British responses easier: by September 1945, members of his family in India, kept prisoner long after others had been released, were also freed.<sup>67</sup> In his own writing, Bose sought to distance himself from ideological collusion with Axis forces, foregrounding his politics instead as solely focused on Indian nationalism:

I stand for absolute self-determination for India where her national affairs are concerned [...] no one should make the mistake of concluding that external collaboration with the Tripartite Powers meant acceptance of their domination or even of their ideology in [India's] internal affairs.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, his connections with fascist powers during the Second World War has left behind a questionable and controversial legacy. By mapping the everyday contours of Axis

broadcasts both delivered by Bose and centred on him, the BBC Monitoring transcripts enable us to interrogate this legacy with greater historical nuance and sophistication.

## **Conclusion**

The Second World War remade the Indian subcontinent. It is no coincidence that merely two years after the end of the war, the British Raj came to an end: India and Pakistan gained independence in August 1947, accompanied by the horrors of communal violence in Partition. This paper has argued against a teleological imperialist or nationalist narrative of Indian decolonisation. Instead, it has considered undivided India during the 1940s – the ‘stormy decade’, as Tanika Sarkar terms it<sup>69</sup> – in terms of crosscurrents of political discourse, viewed through the lens of competition across the airwaves for the ‘hearts and minds’ of Indian people. Broadcasts available to us in textual form through BBC Monitoring transcripts, where such ‘raw histories’ have been meticulously recorded and editorialised, become repositories of cultural meaning for wartime India. By reading colonial broadcasts against other historical sources, this paper has shown how the narrative of unquestioning Indian support for the war was being created, while contesting voices, including resistance to colonial rule itself, were suppressed. It has also looked at transcripts of Axis broadcasts to problematise the intersection of national self-determination with support from fascist powers in the figure of Subhas Chandra Bose, and argued that the granular view provided by monitoring reports becomes valuable in evaluating Bose’s complicated legacy for both the histories of anti-colonial resistance and Axis collaboration.

At the heart of this paper is the unknown Indian listener, ‘tuning in’ to wartime radio. Her motivations for selecting one type of broadcast over the other – or perhaps none at all – have been debated, along with her modes of listening. Did she listen in secret to a prohibited transmission, or among others within a public space to an official broadcast? It is an understanding of the conditions and motivations of her listenership that this paper seeks to contribute to the history of broadcasting, broadening the latter’s frames of reference to include non-European wartime experiences. The paper also pays attention to another type of listener – the BBC monitors – also the subject of historical neglect, and seeks to alert us to the agency of these monitors. It argues that their tasks in selecting, listening to and translating broadcast transmissions were acts of interpretation and representation – from foregrounding colonial imaginings of the Indian Army and an assured sense of Allied power at work, to the careful documenting of Bose’s speeches and the Axis portrayal of this revolutionary, militant Indian political leader. It is because of the BBC monitors, for whom hearing led to translating and transcribing, that we have today the vast textual apparatus by which to interrogate the conflicting wartime political discourses of India over the airwaves.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Stadtler, "'Home' front: Indian soldiers and civilians in Britain, 1939-45," 259-260.

<sup>2</sup> Basu, *Rangrut*, 268. All translations from the Bengali are mine.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, "Establishing Broadcast Monitoring as Open Source Intelligence," 8.

<sup>4</sup> See Ranasinha, "South Asian Broadcasters in Britain," 57-71; Nasta, "Sealing a Friendship," 14-18; Morse, "An 'Impatient Modernist,'" 83-98.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-berkshire-36712152>, 7 July 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, 41, 48.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, 263.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, 120.

<sup>9</sup> I have borrowed this evocative phrase from the title of Elizabeth Edwards's book *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (2001), in which Edwards uses the 'raw' quality of photographs to open up new historical meanings.

<sup>10</sup> Orwell, "Newsletter, 10, 14 February 1942," 970, 6010-6019 (6016).

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Douds, "The men who never were," 187.

<sup>12</sup> Khan, *The Raj at War*, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Sarkar, *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*, 464.

<sup>14</sup> Karnad, *Farthest Field*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Memorandum, J.A. Keyser to Bowerman, Overseas Liaison, 5 August 1942, E2/408/1, BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC).

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum, L Brander, Eastern Intelligence Officer, to European Services Department, 20 August 1943, E1/905, BBC WAC.

<sup>17</sup> Memorandum, Clark to Eastern Services Department, 15 November 1943, E1/905, BBC WAC.

<sup>18</sup> Extract, letter from AC (OS) to New Delhi Director, 30 May 1945, E1/905, BBC WAC. I am very grateful to Laura Johnson for the references on monitoring activities in India, and also for her valuable advice in general on BBC Monitoring during the war.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, 297.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, 136-137.

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, 225.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson, 57.

<sup>23</sup> Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Potter, 78.

<sup>25</sup> Potter, 79.

<sup>26</sup> Potter, 108.

<sup>27</sup> Potter, 108.

<sup>28</sup> Gupta, *Radio and the Raj: 1921-47*, 2, 33.

<sup>29</sup> Gupta, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Khan, 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> Gupta, 34.

<sup>32</sup> Gupta, 35-36.

<sup>33</sup> Gupta, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Zivin, "'Bent': A Colonial Subversive," 198.

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- <sup>35</sup> Gupta, 37.
- <sup>36</sup> For an excellent modern and detailed biography of Bose, including a history of his broadcasts to India, see Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent* (2011).
- <sup>37</sup> *Foreign Commerce Weekly, Volumes 28-29*, 26.
- <sup>38</sup> Khan, *Raj*, 40.
- <sup>39</sup> Khan, *The Great Partition*, 1.
- <sup>40</sup> Johnson, 120-121.
- <sup>41</sup> In India's case, broadcasts classified as 'Persian' possibly refer to Urdu-language transmissions, Urdu being an Indo-Aryan language heavily influenced by Persian vocabulary, written in the Persian alphabet, and spoken widely in northern India.
- <sup>42</sup> See, for example, BBC Monitoring (BBCM) File G122 "India in English."
- <sup>43</sup> BBCM File G122.
- <sup>44</sup> Johnson, 115, 269.
- <sup>45</sup> BBCM File G122, June 1942.
- <sup>46</sup> Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers*, 11-34.
- <sup>47</sup> Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance," 190.
- <sup>48</sup> Johnson, 25.
- <sup>49</sup> BBCM File G122.
- <sup>50</sup> Military censorship reports, L/PJ/12/654, 26 August-1 September 1942, India Office Records, British Library.
- <sup>51</sup> BBCM File G122, 19 August 1942.
- <sup>52</sup> Zachariah, "Gandhi, Non-Violence and Indian Independence," <https://www.historytoday.com/benjamin-zachariah/gandhi-non-violence-and-indian-independence>, March 2011.
- <sup>53</sup> Robbins, "Freedom under Britain," 219.
- <sup>54</sup> Robbins, 217-218.
- <sup>55</sup> Marx, "Dear Listeners in South Africa", 148.
- <sup>56</sup> See Bose, 201-303, for details of Subhas Chandra Bose's movements in Axis territory.
- <sup>57</sup> BBCM File E89 "German in Persian and Hindustani," 16 December 1942. Other examples are from the same file.
- <sup>58</sup> BBCM File E212, 2 June 1942.
- <sup>59</sup> Bose, 266.
- <sup>60</sup> Khan, *Raj*, 113.
- <sup>61</sup> BBCM File E212, May 1942.
- <sup>62</sup> Bose, 219.
- <sup>63</sup> Khan, *Raj*, 218.
- <sup>64</sup> Bose, 292-327.
- <sup>65</sup> In his article on the Dutch government-in-exile's listening service during the war, published in this issue, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer argues that the analysis of London-based monitors led to the trial and execution of Nazi broadcaster Max Blokzijl. The French broadcaster Philippe Henriot was also intensely monitored but assassinated before he could be put on trial. See Chadwick, "Across the Waves," 327-355. I am grateful to Vincent Kuitenbrouwer for alerting me to both these cases.
- <sup>66</sup> Bose, 298-299.
- <sup>67</sup> Bose, 309.
- <sup>68</sup> Quoted in Bose, 222.

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<sup>69</sup> Sarkar, *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (2015).

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